

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions of claims in the application:

1. (Previously Presented) A method of authorizing purchase transactions over a computer network using an account number that identifies a consumer's account from which funds will be withdrawn to pay a purchase price and an authorization token associated with said account number which, when used with said account number, enables withdrawal of funds from said account, said method comprising the steps:

transmitting said account number electronically over said network from a consumer location to an on-line merchant location;

forwarding said account number electronically over said network from said on-line merchant location to a third party contractor location;

determining at said third party contractor location an authentication token type associated with said account number;

prompting a consumer at said consumer location to electronically transmit an authentication token in accordance with said determined authentication token type over said network to said third party contractor location;

transmitting said authentication token electronically over said network from said consumer location to said third party contractor location; and

determining at said third party contractor location whether said account number and said authentication token are valid and, if so, then authorizing the purchase transaction to proceed.

2. (Original) The method according to claim 1 wherein said on-line merchant location is bypassed when said authentication token is transmitted over said network

from said consumer location to said third party contractor location.

3. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1 wherein said account number and said authentication token are transmitted over said network via encrypted connections.

4. (Original) The method according to claim 1 wherein said network is the Internet and wherein said number is electronically transmitted from said on-line merchant location to said third party contractor location over the Internet.

5. (Original) The method according to claim 1 wherein said number is electronically transmitted from said on-line merchant location to said third party contractor location over a private computer network.

6. (Cancelled)

7. (Original) The method according to claim 1 including the additional step of determining at said third party contractor location whether said account has sufficient funds to cover said purchase price.

8. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 1 including the additional step of electronically transmitting a message from said third party contractor location to said on-line merchant location indicating whether said account number and said authentication token are valid.

9. (Original) The method according to claim 7 including the additional step of

electronically transmitting a message from said third party contractor location to said on-line merchant location indicating whether there are sufficient funds in said account to cover said purchase price.

10. (Cancelled)

11. (Original) The system according to claim 1 wherein said authentication token type is at least one of a personal identification number, a biometric signature, an authorization code stored on a smart card, or a password.

12. (Cancelled)

13. (Currently Amended) The system according to claim [[12]] 41 wherein said first computer bypasses said second computer when transmitting said authentication token to said third computer.

14. (Currently Amended) The system according to claim [[12]] 41 wherein said account number and said authentication token are transmitted via encrypted connections.

15. (Cancelled)

16. (Currently Amended) The system according to claim [[12]] 41 wherein said account number is transmitted from said second computer to said third computer over a private computer network.

17. (Currently Amended) The system according to claim [[12]] 41 wherein said account number is transmitted from said second computer to said third computer over a direct connection between the second computer and the third computer.

18. (Currently Amended) The system according to claim [[12]] 41 wherein said third computer is further configured to determine whether said account has sufficient funds to cover said purchase price.

19. (Cancelled)

20. (Original) The system according to claim 18 wherein said third computer is further configured to notify said second computer whether there are sufficient funds in said account to cover said purchase price.

21. (Currently Amended) The system according to claim [[12]] 41 wherein said second computer is further configured to notify said first computer whether said purchase is authorized.

22. (Cancelled)

23. (Currently Amended) A method of authorizing a purchase to be made over a computer network using an account number that identifies a consumer's account from which funds will be withdrawn to pay a purchase price and an authentication token associated with said account number which, when used with said account number, enables withdrawal of funds from said account, said method comprising the steps:

receiving at a third party contractor location said account number

electronically transmitted from an on-line merchant location;

determining at said third party contractor location an authentication token type associated with said number;

prompting a consumer at a consumer location to electronically transmit over said network to said third party contractor location an authentication token in accordance with said authentication token type;

receiving at said third party contractor location said authentication token electronically transmitted over said network from said consumer location; and

verifying the validity of said number and said authentication token at said third party contractor location.

24. (Original) The method according to claim 23 wherein said network is the Internet and wherein said number is electronically transmitted from said on-line merchant location to said third party contractor location over the Internet.

25. (Cancelled)

26. (Original) The method according to claim 23 wherein said number is electronically transmitted from said on-line merchant location to said third party contractor location over a direct connection between the on-line merchant location and the third party contractor location.

27. (Original) The method according to claim 23 including the additional step of determining at said third party contractor location whether said account has sufficient funds to cover said purchase price.

28. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim ~~[[25]]~~ 23 wherein said computer is further configured to notify said on-line merchant's computer whether said account number and authorization token are valid.

29. (Original) The method according to claim 27 including the additional step of electronically transmitting a message from said third party contractor location to said on-line merchant location indicating whether there are sufficient funds in said account to cover said purchase price.

30. (Original) The method according to claim 23 wherein said authentication token type is at least one of a personal identification number, a biometric signature, an authorization code stored on a smart card, or a password.

31. (Currently Amended) A system for authorizing a purchase to be made over a computer network using an account number that identifies a consumer's account from which funds will be withdrawn to pay a purchase price and an authorization token associated with said account number which, when used with said number, enables withdrawal of funds from said account, said system comprising:

a computer connected to said network;

said computer being configured to receive said account number transmitted from an on-line merchant's computer, determine an authentication token type associated with said account number, prompt a consumer's computer to transmit over said network an authentication token to said computer in accordance with said authentication token type, receive said authentication token transmitted over said network from said consumer's computer, and verify the validity of said number and said authentication token.

32. (Currently Amended) The system according to claim 31 wherein said network is the Internet and wherein said account number is transmitted from said on-line merchant's computer to said computer over the Internet.

33. (Currently Amended) The system according to claim 31 wherein said account number is transmitted from said online merchant's computer to said computer over a private computer network.

34. (Currently Amended) The system according to claim 31 wherein said account number is electronically transmitted from said on-line merchant's computer to said computer over a direct connection between the on-line merchant computer and said computer.

35. (Original) The system according to claim 31 wherein said computer is further configured to determine whether said account has sufficient funds to cover said purchase price.

36. (Currently Amended) The system according to claim 31 wherein said computer is further configured to notify said on-line merchant's computer whether said account number and authentication token are valid.

37. (Original) The system according to claim 35 wherein said computer is further configured to notify said on-line merchant's computer whether there are sufficient funds in said account to cover said purchase price.

38. (Original) The system according to claim 31 wherein said authentication token type is at least one of a personal identification number, a biometric signature, an authorization code stored on smart card, or a password.

39. (New) The method according to claim 1 wherein said number is electronically transmitted from said on-line merchant location to said third party contractor location over a direct connection between the on-line merchant location and the third party contractor location.

40. (New) The method according to claim 1 including the additional step of electronically transmitting a message over said network from said on-line merchant location to said consumer location whether said purchase has been authorized.

41. (New) A system for authorizing a purchase to be made over a computer network using an account number that identifies a consumer's account from which funds will be withdrawn to pay a purchase price and an authentication token associated with said number which, when used with said account number, enables withdrawal of funds from said account, said system comprising:

a first computer at a consumer location, said first computer being connected to said network;

a second computer at an on-line merchant location, said second computer being connected to said network; and

a third computer at a third party contractor location, said third computer being connected to said network;

said first computer being configured to (1) transmit said account number over said network to said second computer and (2) transmit said authentication token over

said network to said third computer;

said second computer being configured to forward said number received from said first computer to said third computer; and

said third computer being configured to (1) determine an authentication token type associated with said account number; (2) prompt said first computer to transmit an authentication token in accordance with said determined authentication token type over said network, and (3) determine whether said number and said authentication token are valid.

42. (New) The system according to claim 41 wherein said network is the Internet and wherein said account number is transmitted from said second computer to said third computer over the Internet.

43. (New) The system according to claim 41 wherein said third computer is further configured to notify said second computer whether said account number and said authentication token are valid.

44. (New) The system according to claim 41 wherein said authentication token type is at least one of a personal identification number, a biometric signature, an authorization code stored on a smart card, or a password.

45. (New) The method according to claim 23 wherein said account number is electronically transmitted from said on-line merchant location to said third party contractor location over a private computer network.